

The (re)development of New Zealand's Chinese heritage sites and the potential for the Chinese visitor market

New Zealand Tourism and Hospitality Research Conference,
Hanmer Springs, New Zealand 3rd-5th December 2008.

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Presentation Notes (4th December 2008)

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The Chinese gold rush in New Zealand occurred between 1865 and 1900.

The first group of Chinese miners arrived New Zealand in 1865. They were invited from Victoria in Australia to rework the Otago goldfield when European miners left. By 1869 the Chinese gold seekers were coming direct from China, nearly all of them were males of Cantonese rural area. At its peak the Chinese population was about 5000. The Chinese also sought gold on the West Coast. By the mid 1870s Chinese made up the largest minority group on the West Coast goldfields.

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The Chinese gold seekers experienced hardship in New Zealand. Their living conditions were generally poor. They lived in rough little huts. Most of them spoke very little English. They were disliked by the Europeans and were excluded from New Zealand society. They were not allowed to live in the towns or be buried in local grave yards. In response to that, they established their own camps and formed small Chinese communities.

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Now more than a hundred of years have passed. The places where the Chinese miners used to live have ruined and covered up by regenerating forests. Only a few huts, and stores have

survived. The last big remains of the Cromwell Chinatown settlement was flooded when the Clyde Dam was built in 1992.

There were only 3 Chinese gold rush sites were registered by the Historic Places Trust before year 2002.

In 2002 former Prime Minister Helen Clark made a formal apology for discriminatory laws imposed in Chinese immigrants in the early times. As a part of the apology, the government supported the establishment of the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust and later paid \$5 million to help promoting the preservation and awareness of Chinese history in NZ. In 2003, 10 Chinese gold rush sites was proposed to add to the Trust's Register to make up for the shortcoming in the number of publicly recognized Chinese places; since then 8 sites have been added to the register, taking the total to 11.

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At the current time, there are several ongoing projects on the Chinese gold mining heritage and history.

Research on Chinese history on the West Coast, this being carried out by Shantytown researcher with funding from the Poll Tax Trust. As a part of this project, the first book about Chinese history on the West Coast will published.

Lawrence Chinese Camp reconstruction project: This once the largest gold rush Chinese settlement is proposed to become the largest Chinese heritage attraction in New Zealand. The buildings that used to stand on the settlement will be rebuilt, car parks hotels, restaurants and a Chinese garden will also be built on the site.

Finally a newly proposed Chinese Heritage Trail; It is proposed to link the Chinese garden in Dunedin, goldfield of Lawrence, Tuapeka Gorge's Mining Center and Arrowtown Chinese settlement.

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Other than the government apology and the establishment of Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust, there are several factors that are possibly leading the current increasing interest in Chinese history and heritage sites.

Since culture and heritage tourism was specifically identified as a sector that requiring further development in New Zealand tourism Strategy 2010, there has been a effort to lift its capacity and to better understand its opportunities. NZTS 2015 states that there will be continued emphasis on the developing heritage tourism. The history of the Chinese, who

were the largest non-European and non-Polynesian early settlers group to arrive New Zealand, has therefore received more attention.

According to the data released by Statistics New Zealand the Chinese migrants has become the largest ethnicity among Asian migrants. This has made the Chinese community more noticeable.

The free trade agreement between China and New Zealand has made China become an important economic partner. The changes in New Zealand's societal structure and economic circumstances fostered a greater interest and appreciation of New Zealand Chinese culture and heritage.

Lastly increasing number of Chinese tourists: This is often given as justification for current redevelopment of Chinese heritage. Mainland China has already become New Zealand's fourth largest market. Therefore some people believe there is need for developing a "Chinese-specific tourism product". The developers believe that Chinese heritage sties could be the right product.

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Before I started my field work, I reviewed existing literatures on:

Politics of identity: Like the identification and preservation of heritage is a highly political activity. Perceptions of the past and what is defined as heritage is always linked to present hierarchies and interest groups.

Issues of interpretation: How the balance of educational and entertaining objectives can be achieved. And how 'edgy' it should be when it comes to interpreter gold rush heritage.

Visitor are interested in learning the history, however at the same they want to enjoy their time and may not want to be depressed by some of the harsh facts, such as discriminations.

Chinese gold mining heritage sites: Some researches and case studies on Chinese heritage sites that were conducted in Australia.

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For this study, three sites are selected for case studies, namely Shantytown, Arrowtown Chinese settlement and Lawrence Chinese camp is still a concept.

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It is located on the West Coast, 10kms south of Greymouth. It was opened in 1978, a long established commercial site. It is a replica of old gold mining town. The main attractions of the Shantytown are old time buildings, a ride on a steam train, gold panning and natural walks. It is the only site contains Chinese elements on the West Coast.

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The Chinatown is relatively small, about 4 buildings and a little garden, and it is not a considered as a main attraction.

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The Arrowtown Chinese settlement is quite well known and the most complete and accessible Chinese mining heritage sites in New Zealand. The settlement was first excavated in the early 1980s and then redeveloped as the compensation for the loss of Cromwell's Chinatown. The most recent restoration was in 2003 when the funding was made available from the government apology.

It is owned and managed by Department of Conservation and is free to the public, but not to tour groups; an concession is charged for guide tours in the area.

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Lawrence Chinese camp is located about a kilometer north of Lawrence. As I have mentioned earlier, It was one of the largest Chinese settlement had 30 to 40 buildings and well-formed streets. It is currently undergoing a reconstruction project. There are only two buildings left. This one was once a part of a hotel.

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A qualitative research method of semi-structured interviews was conducted. I found some of the key people's contact details from their organization's web sites and then used snow ball sampling technique to find other suitable respondents. I have talked to people who are involved in developing, promoting and managing Chinese heritage sites, like site managers, researchers, museum directors, members of local business and promotion association, local tour operators and DoC staff. I have also talked to some Chinese tour guides.

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Is Chinese heritage a potential product for Chinese market?

The developers and managers of Chinese heritage sites said.....

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However the Chinese tour guides think the Chinese heritage will be not very attractive to the Chinese markets. They said the Chinese tourists probably wouldn't mind look at one, but no more than two sites during their trips, so a complete heritage trail wouldn't appeal.

There are several reasons for that:

Motivation of tourists. Chinese tourists, come to see what New Zealand is famous for in China, such as big flocks of sheep and cows, green and clear environment, glacier, Maori culture and Milford sound. Most Chinese tourists are not aware of Chinese history in New Zealand.

Previous experience of tourists. Many Chinese tourists have been to Australia. they may have already seen bigger and better Chinese gold mining centers there. The Chinese tour guide said sometimes their clients complain about there is no much to see at Chinese heritage sites in NZ.

Structure and restrictions of tours. The Chinese visitors normally have very limited time and somehow limited budget.

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For local Chinese tour groups, they only have 5-6 days to travel around South Island. By local Chinese tour groups, I meant by those people who are living in New Zealand or come to visit family and friends in New Zealand. They book their trips through Chinese travel agencies in New Zealand. The itinerary for the trip is normally is from CHCH---Shantytown/Hokitika (via Arthur's pass)-Fox glacier-Queenstown-- Milford sound---Te Anau--- Dunedin--- Oamaru— CHCH.

For inbound tour groups, who book their trips in China often only have 3 days to spend in South Island. Normally from CHCH---Queenstown--Milford sound—Queenstown, and leave from there.

Therefore, only local Chinese tour groups go to visit Shantytown as a convenient lunch spot. They usually have about 2 hours to spend there. They have their lunch, ride on the train, do gold panning. Then it would be the time to leave. So, they do not have time to visit the Chinatown, or at least it is not a priority.

Both types of tour groups visit Arrowtown as it is on their route. They stop there for from 15 minutes to 1 and half hour. The tour groups won't visit the Chinese Village formally, as this would incur a charge by DoC, however group members are free to explore it themselves, but few do so, despite it being pointed out to them by the tour guide. They would rather spend time in the gold shop, jade shop and wool shop. The tour guides

comment that they don't seem very interested in the Chinese village and do not understand what it is about due to lack of Chinese interpretation on the site.

When tour guides were asked about the potential of Lawrence, they felt it would be hard to get Chinese tour groups to visit there. It is not on the route and tour guides felt it would be impossible to be included without adding an additional day to the tour, which would mean extra costs for petrol, meals, accommodation, and pay for driver and guide. Most importantly the tour guides felt that this additional cost to see Lawrence would not add value to the whole tour experience in the eyes of the consumers and would in fact make the travel agencies lose their competitiveness in the market.

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So, is it the problem of marketing? Most of Chinese visitors are not aware of Chinese history in NZ. New Zealand is famous to Chinese visitors for its natural elements, not the cultural and historical elements, except the Maori culture. The tour guides told me they used to guide their clients through the Arrowtown Chinese settlement. The Chinese visitors all enjoyed it, Some showed their interest by asking the guide questions.

Is it the problem of the nature of Chinese tourism in NZ? At this stage, for many Chinese visitors having a holiday overseas means to see as many things as they could within the shortest time period and with lowest budget. In response, the Chinese tour agencies have to reduce the cost of by putting in more free attractions, and trying to include as many places as they can in just a few days. Therefore, the Chinese tour groups experience few tourism activities other than sightseeing, and have to spend long time on traveling. This may change as more and more Chinese are able to travel more independently. However, would Chinese heritage sites appeal to Chinese FITs? It is still largely unknown.

It is the problem of site development? The interpretation on site could be a problem. For example, at the Arrowtown Chinese settlement there is not enough explanation in Chinese. If the Chinese visit there without the guide they are probably not be able to understand what is all about, and appreciate what they are looking at.

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Is China the wrong market for Chinese heritage tourism product? China is a country that full of rich histories and magnificent heritage sites. To the Chinese visitors the Chinese heritage sites in New Zealand may just not large and impressive enough to compare with the ones they could see at home. Also, it may just the nature for the Chinese visitors that they are not interested in seeing Chinese stuff in New Zealand. For example: the Dunedin Chinese garden. The Chinese tour guides told me they do not think their clients would be interested

in seeing it, definitely not if they have to pay. However, the mother of one of authors of this paper thinks it is wonderful.

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There is definitely growing interest to Chinese heritage sites from supply side, and there is a growing number of potential attractions for the Chinese visitors. However its appeal to the Chinese market is still large unknown, especially of the FITs. However, The Chinese heritage may have greater appeal to domestic and other international visitors, as it is a part of New Zealand history. And finally, further research might be needed on finding how Chinese tour operators think about the potential of Chinese heritage in New Zealand, and some surveys with Chinese visitors, both tour groups and FITs, may need to be conducted.